

Human Rights Commission Meeting Minutes

May 12, 2010

7:30 PM at Newton City Hall

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Peter Brown, Marianne Ferguson (chair), Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondschein, Sona Petrossian, Susan Thomas, Jane Brown

Commissioners absent/regrets: Muriel Esdale, Judy Fischbach.

Advisory council members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Ann Capoccia, Samuel Glass, Viviana Planine, Joan Rubin, Frank Wolpe, Dianne Chilingirian

Advisory council members absent/regrets: Homer Franck, Carol Y. Kelley, Norman F. Lazarus, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, and Susan Rosenthal. Lillian Backman, Dianne Chilingirian, Nazik Kazimi,

Advisory Students present: Lily Konowitz-NSHS.

Advisory Students council members absent/regrets: Camilla Jackson-NNHS, Haniya Syeda-NNHS, and Stephi Dworkin-NSHS.

Guest: Andrea Segal, Jack Porter, Wanda Pazmino

Meeting called to order at 7:35pm, Welcome/Intro's

School Updates

Lily Konowitz gave the school report. The week of remembrance at South High School was great. The lectures and showcase in library was well attended. The banner was well placed. She is trying to get something into the newspaper. Newton Serves was supported by athletes serving the community. April 14th was the day of silence to support student's sexual orientation/ gender identity. Many students took part with support from teaching staff to stay silent. May 9th was a talent show to raise money for Haiti. May 19th and 21st will be political awareness days. Tim Cahill will be the featured speaker on the 19th. Ruth Balser and Kay Khan in the 21st. May

28th holocaust survivor, Steve Ross, will speak. On April 27th a student presented their experience during an exchange program in India.

Guest Presenter

Wanda Pazmino is the citywide Latina family liaison for the Newton Public Schools. Wanda has lived in Newton for over 24 years and has worked in the system for 19 years. She has raised a daughter here and now has a grandchild in the Newton public school system. The Latino population is the fastest growing group in the United States. New families move here every year and come from many different places; Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Columbia, Peru. The Spanish language is the common language among these groups but the customs are very different. The median age is 26.5 years. Most are young parents. If they are not legal they cannot do a lot of things in this country; they are not eligible to vote, cannot get a drivers license, are not eligible for publicly assisted housing, and cannot apply for food stamps. Most are hard working families who work 2-3 jobs to make ends meet. Why do they choose Newton to live? Three reasons; it is safe, quiet and has good schools. Safety is the number one concern. The census is currently taking place in our country. Most Latino families in Newton will not fill out the form. They are very reluctant because they so not understand and may not be able to read English. In some cases they are also illiterate in their own language. Therefore, the census numbers will not accurately reflect the Latino population.

Peter asked if efforts were being made to reach these people. Wanda answered that they feel the information may be used against them.

Wanda continued to discuss where Latinos live in Newton. They are dispersed throughout the villages in Newton. There is not one area of concentration and not one leader in the community.

Frank asked if we had many illegals here. Wanda answered; yes there are many Latinos that are here illegally. Frank explained his wife is from Mexico and she thinks they are afraid. Wanda said that is true and the issues happening in Arizona currently are making people more afraid.

Wanda discussed the educational background. Many Latinos have a limited educational background. Higher educated Latinos are often here for a short period of time. Most are illiterate in Spanish as well and do not use computers. They cannot look on a website to get important information. Therefore Latino children are at a disadvantage. They are often behind in

school compared to others their age. Newton library is a great resource. Wanda encourages the families to read in Spanish but this is primarily an oral community. She works with the children and outreach to their families. Oral explanation works best but phone messages are not often heard.

Sam asked if there are night schools for working parents. Wanda answered yes but they are often too expensive. Also many work a second job at night.

Andrea said that transportation is awful in the City of Newton.

Jack commented that many people have a sense of exceptionalism and want special treatment. He feels they overwhelm the system and that many other cultures need to learn our language and not expect special treatment.

Wanda said she understood his perspective as these are very difficult issues to address. She said that they want to contribute and are hard working. They want to send their children to camp but cannot afford it so often the children sit at home all summer. Most are not eligible for healthcare. They tend to live in multi family dwellings. There is a lack of affordable housing and some places are rodent infested and not appropriate homes. She has worked with other agencies like the health department to address these concerns.

She shared some statistics from the City: 724 Latino students, 384 in elementary schools, 150 in middle school and 190 in high school. 6.1% Latino, 5.1% African American, and 4.5% multi race. The common employment is the service delivery system; food service, landscaping, housekeeping, construction, manual laborer. Newton has some good multi agency support, Ana from City hall, Jody from ELL at Newton Public Schools, NCSC and the Newton library. Riverside has youth outreach workers who are also very supportive. The one to one program is a mentoring program run by Nancy Holzer. Space camp has some scholarships as well as creative head start and YMCA. Wanda follows children until age 22. Her goal is to increase awareness and help them succeed in the community.

Susan commented that teaching English to parents should be more affordable. Wanda said most need to be competent in Spanish first. The ESL program at the library is good but has a long wait list.

Viviana said literacy in their own language first is important.

Sam said his parents did not speak English when they first arrived in this country but had a desire to work hard. Do they have that desire? Wanda answered yes. There is a great desire to work hard and become American citizens.

Susan asked what percentage of the Latino population is legal. Wanda had no idea.

Peter commented that immigration laws are tougher now. Is there something we can do? Wanda said after 911 it became much harder to apply for legal status.

Brenda asked if there are any religious organizations involved. Wanda said there are no Latino churches in Newton. Ministers from Boston do come to Newton and there is a catholic church in Waltham that many attend that has a Spanish mass.

Frank said that Latinos are very family oriented and hard working but illegal do not have a pathway to citizenship. His wife went to Brookline High and learned English for free. Newton school system should give classes free.

Viviana said South High has free classes. Susan asked what opportunities existed for them to learn English.

Ann said she spent 5 years in the mission hill section of Boston. She is involved with cultural competence at the State, There are many different languages and our community should be multicultural and be welcoming to all. Newton should be par of the family literacy program.

Wanda said Latinos unfortunately have a high drop out rate especially if they do not pass the MCAS test. After high school they cannot attend college if they are illegal because they would need a social security number.

Viviana said there is a Latino club at South high that recently participated in the walk for hunger. They want to eliminate stereotypes. The church could be a common bond.

Sam asked about other cities. Wanda said Wellesley and Needham are experiencing increasing population and have called for her advice.

Susan asked about Latinos that have become successful as role models for others. Wanda said there are many examples of successful Latinos but only if you have the education and are legal.

Marianne said one way this group could help would be to volunteer for the ESL program at the library.\

Brenda asked if Wanda worked alone. Yes, she works alone – 6 hours in ELL and 6 hours in special education. In reality she works many more hours a week attending all IEP's and some parent teacher conferences.

Sheila thought we should advocate for more hours.

Hate Crime/Incident Reports

Lt. Apotheker – no new incidents to report.

Extended a thank-you to the mayor and health department for their work during the water emergency. Also spoke about the new anti bullying law in effect for school system making mandatory reporting a law for all

school personnel. He also commented on the issue of camera installation in the schools becoming a big issue. Cameras would be placed in public areas and would be an important tool especially in terms of theft. Susan asked about restorative justice. Bruce said restorative justice circles are very good especially when addressing bullying issues. The MOU also mandates notification. Viviana said faculty was asked their opinion of the new law and many voices were heard.

Administrative Business

April and March minutes accepted

Committee Reports

Fair Housing

Sheila reported that the Newton Fair Housing Committee has finalized and put out to bid the proposal for an architectural access consultant to review Newton systems and procedures for assuring compliance with applicable access requirements and to make appropriate recommendations. She also advised that there was recent training on reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, which was targeted to housing authority staff and other municipal employees in Newton and beyond.

There will be a HRC sponsored program on September 27, 2010 at the Newton library on Chapter 40B, the state affordable housing law, with speakers on both sides of the issues. Sheila attended a recent legislative hearing on the proposed repeal of Chapter 40B, where vigorous opposition to the law was heard. There will be a kick off event to protect Chapter 40B on June 22 at Fenway Park in the State Street pavilion from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Jack Porter said that he advises all his real estate students regarding the recent (2006 and 2007) Newton housing discrimination testing studies.

Program Committee

Brenda said there will be a program on May 18th at the Senior Center from 7-9 pm to continue the conversation and discussion about 'Traces of

the Trade'. She had 40 responses so far. All are welcome to come. Susan said she has heard from 10 and has sent some reminders. She would like to encourage more people to read books and attend these programs.

Education

Sona said the 2 "Days of Remembrance" programs were very successful. She sent the program to the Mayors office. They will try to add Native Americans.

Communications

Susan suggested that the Advisory Council co-chairs might be in the best position to ask 1-2 members to volunteer to be the new "communications people" – not necessarily "chairs" if they don't want that term, but if there are 2 they could be co-chairs. It's a job for more than one person; it could involve keeping up with what needs to be communicated to the media, writing articles, etc. Susan said she would be glad to continue doing some of the writing, but not doing the entire job alone. She also circulated information on how to send letters to the Newton Tab.

Membership

No report

MAHRC

Peter cannot attend the next meeting. If anyone is interested it is Friday morning at Medford City Hall. June 23rd is the Food Bank trip.

Clergy

No report

Other Business

Linda said she gave the brochure to the Mayor's office to review the mayor's greeting on the inside panel. Susan mentioned that the list of programs, on one panel of the brochure, needs to be updated as well. A couple of program committee people could easily do this and she would be glad to be one of them.

She also met with Sona to see what updates are needed on the website. She will meet with IT to try and make the suggested changes. The list serve was found and a mail list is now available for information to be sent to interested people. Storage space will be found for all items related to HRC. She will work with commissioners to locate an appropriate spot at City Hall.

Jane will collect money for a gift for Bev Droz and will choose a gift.

Marianne reminded the group about the Mayors prayer breakfast to take place on May 26 2010 at 7:30 am at Boston College. Tickets are \$25.00 and Deval Patrick is the speaker.

Susan circulated articles on the ongoing discussion about the METCO program in the City and in the TAB newspaper. She suggested a community discussion and asked if HRC should sponsor this.

Marianne gave a budget reminder that all expenditures must be in by May 31st. Original receipts are needed. Balance does not carry forward.

Meeting Adjourned - 9:20 PM